DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 580 HE 036 218

TITLE	University Education in Ontario: Shared Goals & Building Blocks.
INSTITUTION	Council of Ontario Universities, Toronto.
ISBN	ISBN-0-88799-384-2
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	7p.; Prepared by the Futures Task Force of the Council of Ontario Universities. Contains small print.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.cou.on.ca.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Role; *Educational Objectives; Educational Planning; Foreign Countries; *Higher Education; Public Policy

ABSTRACT

This brochure suggests five goals that are likely to be shared by the people of Ontario, their government, and the province's publicly funded universities for a strong university system, and identifies the building blocks and resource-related commitments that would enable Ontario universities to achieve these goals. The goals are: (1) all appropriately qualified Ontario students will have access to a place in an Ontario university; (2) no student will be denied access to the program of his or her choice for financial reasons; (3) the education received by Ontario university students will be the best in Canada and on par with that offered in the best public universities worldwide; (4) research support will enable Ontario's faculty and students to add valuable knowledge and produce economic and societal benefits to all Ontario residents such that the province secures a reputation for excellence in both its scientific/medical and its humanities/social sciences research; and (5) the physical environment of Ontario universities will be safe, up-to-date, accessible to those with special needs, and will enhance the learning effectiveness of each student's educational experience. (EV)

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UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

SHARED GOALS & BUILDING BLOCKS

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BACKGROUND

Ontario universities have entered a decade of the greatest growth in enrolments since the 1960s, with the student population on campuses expected to swell by an additional 90,000 over the next eight years. In contrast, however, the operating grant per student for Ontario universities has declined by 24% from 1993-94 to 2003-2004 in constant dollars. The Ontario government's provision of full average funding for growth[1] as well as of a Quality Assurance Fund will help offset this decline partially. Still, it remains crucial that Ontario redress this shortfall and enhance the standard of educational quality so that Ontario universities can help not only the province to build a globally competitive economy but also Ontario's students to prepare for a full and stimulating life.

Investment in universities is essential for prosperity. Ontario's Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress noted that higher education is key to innovation and productivity growth. But Ontario lags when compared to its U.S. reference group[2] in terms of investment in postsecondary education and, as a result, misses many of the benefits that world-class universities such as the University of California at Berkeley or Los Angeles can pass on to their communities. For example, Ontario lags dramatically in terms of conferring masters and doctorates per capita and, consequently, is not providing enough highly qualified people to meet private- and public-sector demands.

SHARED GOALS

It is suggested that Ontarians, their government and the universities could agree on the following goals to ensure that the province's higher education system is able to play its part in securing the economic and social progress of Ontario:

1. All appropriately qualified Ontario students will have access to a place in an Ontario university.
2. No student will be denied access to the program of his or her choice for financial reasons.
3. The education received by Ontario university students will be the best in Canada and on par with that offered in the best public universities worldwide.
4. Research support will enable Ontario's faculty and students to add valuable knowledge and produce economic and societal benefits to all Ontario residents such that the province secures a reputation for excellence in both its scientific/medical and its humanities/social sciences research.
5. The physical environment of Ontario universities will be safe, up-to-date, accessible to those with special needs, and will enhance the learning effectiveness of each student's educational experience.

[1] Full average funding is provided primarily for undergraduate growth, resulting from the double cohort and demographic change; graduate growth, while also funded, is capped for the next four years.

[2] The Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, in its First Annual Report of November 2002, uses a reference group of 14 U.S. states (Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, California, Illinois, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Florida) as well as Quebec to compare Ontario's economic and productivity performance. It suggests that Ontario should aim to improve its ranking from its current 14th position by one place every two years over the coming decade.

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BUILDING BLOCKS AND PROPOSED COMMITMENTS

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The key building blocks to reach these goals are improving student financial assistance, hiring adequate numbers of first-rate faculty and staff, sustaining support for research, funding the expansion of graduate programs, and expanding physical facilities as well as modernizing the existing stock. For each of these building blocks, a specific resource-related commitment that would enable universities to meet the shared goal is proposed:

1 UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ASSISTANCE

- ***Sufficient student financial support will be provided through existing and new mechanisms to ensure that no properly qualified student is denied access to the program of his or her choice for financial reasons.***

There have been considerable changes to Ontario's student financial assistance programs in recent years, with greater emphasis on the use of loans, stricter eligibility requirements that include more onerous requirements for middle-income families, and much greater reliance on institutional funds. There has also been greater pressure on universities to provide Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) services that were previously the responsibility of government. Some of these changes have resulted in improved services to students, but they have also added to the system's complexity and the debt load borne by students. Needed improvements should include:

- Providing students with access to unsubsidized government-sponsored loans;
- Providing interest relief on loans on a graduated basis rather than the current all-or-nothing approach, so that individuals who are unable to make full payments could make partial payments to cover the interest costs; and
- Ensuring that all interest costs on all student loans are tax-deductible, regardless of the source of the loan.

2 FACULTY

- ***Sufficient operating grant funding will be provided to Ontario universities to reduce student-faculty ratios initially to the Canadian average and, over the long term, to the U.S. reference group average.***

The number of faculty at Ontario universities declined by 9%[3] between 1992-93 and 2002-2003 while student enrolment increased by 14%, making Ontario's student-faculty ratio the highest in Canada, having risen from 19-1 to 24-1 over the past decade. When compared to 170 reference group institutions[4] in the U.S., Ontario's ratio is 36% higher. Bringing Ontario's ratio down to the reference group average will require the addition of approximately 5,000 faculty positions paid for through an increase in the annual provincial operating grant of approximately $525 million. This recruitment effort constitutes an unprecedented challenge and opportunity for faculty renewal. Ontario will face very strong competition from other jurisdictions in attracting top-calibre professors and withstanding ongoing attempts to lure talented faculty away. The operating grant increases should be allocated in a manner that corrects the grant inequity associated with the "unfunded students" in many of Ontario universities.

[3] Based on preliminary estimates for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003.

[4] The 170 reference group institutions are listed on page 8 of "Comparing Ontario and Public Universities," December 2000, available at *http://www.cou.on.ca/publications/briefs_reports/Ontario%20vs%20US%20peers.PDF*

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3 RESEARCH

- ***Sufficient research support will be provided to increase Ontario's share of Canadian research funding to match Ontario's share of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).***

Canada is much more dependent on the higher education sector for its research and development output than most other G-7 countries, and must foster university research to maintain its competitiveness. Since 1997, both the provincial and federal governments have demonstrated an increasing awareness of the importance of university-based research to the economy. Ontario initiatives such as the Ontario Research and Development Challenge Fund, the Ontario Innovation Trust, the Research Performance Fund and the Premier's Research Excellence Awards have infused over $800 million into Ontario university research activities since 1998. Ontario's share of federal research funding – never above 39% over the past decade (2000-2001 is the latest year for which figures are available) – has consistently been below its share of the national GDP, which has been around 42% in recent years. For the sum of federal and provincial funding to reach 42% of the Canadian total, an additional $64 million per year would be needed. If Ontario were to provide half this amount – an additional $32 million per year – it would require an approximate 13% increase over the province's 2000-2001 research support levels. Given the global market for first-rate scholars, these excellent initiatives should be reinforced and provided within a long-term funding framework. Attracting and retaining both top-notch faculty as well as excellent graduate students will result in direct and sustained benefits to the provincial economy.

4 GRADUATE EDUCATION

- ***Sufficient graduate education places and graduate student financial assistance will be provided to meet the requirements of Ontario's knowledge-intensive industries and to ensure a supply of high-quality faculty in our universities.***

Demand for graduate studies – arising from escalating undergraduate enrolment, from the increased recognition of the value of higher degrees to individual students and to society as a whole, and from the demands of the Ontario labour market for highly qualified persons – will climb steadily over the decade. With a growing number of institutions likely to be in a much improved position to expand graduate enrolments, the funding of graduate programs at the appropriate level will help satisfy the expected increase in demand. This will:

- Contribute to research activities in the province;
- Strengthen regional economies; and
- Prepare future Ontario university faculty.

The increase in faculty associated with the second building block is essential in providing the capacity to boost graduate enrolment. To attract the best graduate students in a world competing for talent, the other necessary elements are competitive graduate scholarships, competitive infrastructure (including library facilities, information technology and equipment) and competitive research support.

The Council of Ontario Universities has commissioned BearingPoint (formerly KPMG Consulting) to provide a projection of the demand for Ontario graduate education. Preliminary estimates suggest that the size of graduate activity in Ontario should be more than doubled by the end of this decade. This is consistent with the goal set out in the recent federal innovation strategy of increasing national graduate enrolment by 5% per year.

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5 FACILITIES

- ***Sufficient capital will be provided to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog at Ontario universities over 10 years to ensure a productive and safe learning environment.***

SuperBuild significantly facilitated the addition of new facilities at all Ontario university campuses and, as a result, helped accommodate the influx of the double cohort. (The recently announced new round of SuperBuild projects will add even more spaces.) However, existing campus facilities remain in desperate need of renewal. The average university building was 33 years old in 2001 and not configured for the computer age. Most laboratories are outmoded, and some are obsolete. Increased space is needed for workspaces for the greater number of faculty and graduate students, and for more lecture halls for the additional numbers of students expected over the decade and beyond.

The 2002 facilities condition audit, conducted by Ontario universities, found that the estimated current replacement value of all the facilities is $12.0 billion and the estimated deferred maintenance is $1.3 billion ($1.56 billion when adaptation/renewal renovations are included). Currently, the provincial government is providing $27 million, which represents 17% of that required to maintain the status quo and just 12% of that needed to provide the facilities students and faculty really need. Just to maintain the inadequate status quo, over $100 million per year of additional investment is required.

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ISBN 0-88799-364-2

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